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STUDIES IN FURNITURE DESIGN.

SEVENTH PARALLEL—ITALIAN AND SPANISH RENAISSANCE.

THERE is no period in the history of Art that offers the writer and the painter a field so wide for the exercise of his talent, no period so well calculated to arouse the enthusiasm and inspire the pen, as the epoch of the Renaissance. Whether it be the much admired grotesques of the Italian ornamentation or the flamboyant decoration of the Spaniards, it commands the respect of the lovers of art, furnishes the designer with ideas and the author with his most interesting tales.

Europe had been in a condition of stagnation during the Middle Ages, intellectually she had deteriorated, and morally there had been no progress. The countries had been absorbed in the extremes of a religious contention, and it was difficult to determine which party was the most fatal to the well being of society. The fanatics laboring for the establishment of an arbitrary and despotic religion regarded learning other than that immediately associated with their creeds, as heretical, discouraged the arts and countenanced nothing that did not directly reflect credit or profit upon the Church. The fanatics laboring against this at-

which, preserved to-day in museums or unearthed by some titled builder disturbing the grounds of his palace, serve as examples for the best forms of modern work.

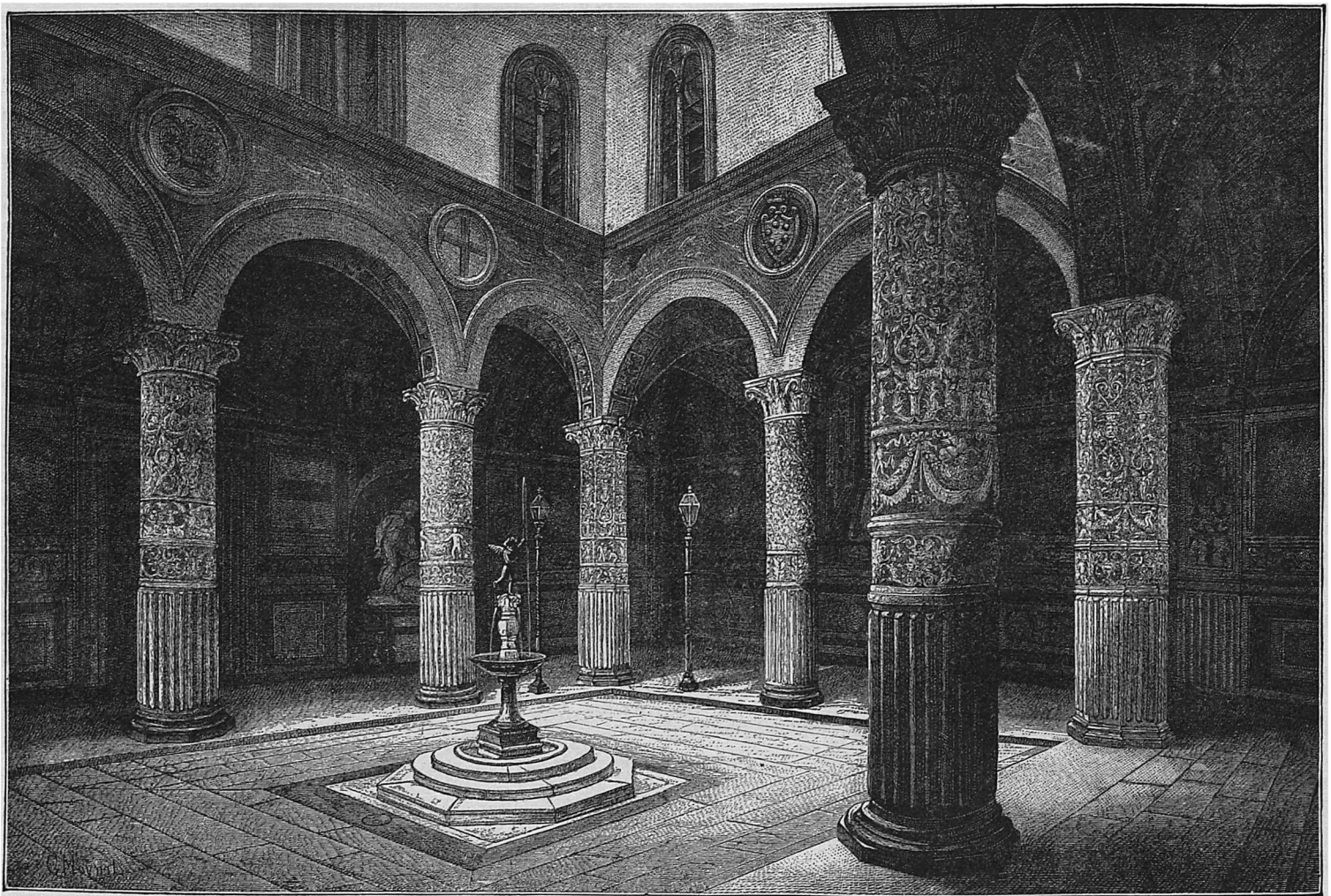
Every means were employed to give an attractive and original appearance to the furniture, inlays of agate, carnelian, lapis-lazuli and various marbles, with all sorts of fancy woods. The wood was carved in every conceivable part and in every possible form, caryatid figures were numerous, animals, and floral subjects were reproduced in the most striking and forcible manner.

Mr. Pallen in writing of the furniture of this time says: "Another method of ornamentation dependent on material that came into use in this century, was the Pietra Dura or mosaic paneling of hard pebbles. The work is laborious and costly. Not only are the materials expensive, but each part must be ground laboriously to an exact shape and the whole mosaic fitted together. Besides being formed into marble panels for table-tops and cabinet fronts, Pietra Dura was let into wood, and helped out with gay colors the more sombre walnut or ebony base of the furniture," and in describing a table-top from Vasari, he adds: "This table was constructed of ebony, that is veneered with ebony, divided into compartments by columns of heliotrope, Oriental jasper and lapis-lazuli, which have bases and capitals of chased silver. The work is furthermore enriched with jewels,

elaborate carving peculiar to any one kind of furniture, for it extended through the ordinary articles of home use and embraced even the pews and stalls of the parish churches, showing in these latter buildings some of the most beautiful testimonials we have remaining to the untiring skill and genius of Marcos Garcia, Tomas de Murga, Alonso Parezano, Francisco Radis and a host of others whose names are familiar to those acquainted with early Spanish industrial pursuits.

When it was possible or desirable to introduce stone columns or panels, it was done, and the prettiest effects were often acquired by this means, jasper was frequently employed and pure white marble was not unknown as a decorative material.

Furniture of an architectural character was very popular, and introduced pilasters, friezes, panels and various other distinctively architectural features. Ebony made the most beautiful examples of furniture, and the Spanish possessions in America giving the home government such quantities of silver, the mineral was freely used in repoussé work to lay upon the dark woods. Tortoise shell and bronze veneer is found upon the pieces that remain, while tortoise shell, ebony, mother-of-pearl and ivory inlays were by no means uncommon. Medallions showing paintings upon glass, copper or enamels adorned the cabinets and larger articles, as did very fine examples of damascene work.



COURT OF THE PALAZZO VECCHIO, FLORENCE.

tempted encroachment upon individual rights, went as far to the other extreme, and had no time to give attention to anything but wrangling and contention.

Finally, however, both parties realized the consequences of their entire neglect of temporal affairs, and this awakening to the claims of the intellect, and a return to the finer sensibilities, was known as the Renaissance—a new birth, and it produced some of the finest works, compositions literary and artistic, that the world has ever known.

Architecture and the sumptuary arts show more markedly than anything else the influence of the revival of sense. Buildings, not alone in their ornamentation, but in the plan of their construction, surpassed any that had been erected since the classic styles prevailed. Furniture and the decoration of rooms put on a magnificence that surpassed in many respects even the luxurious elegance of Athens or Pompeii.

Terra cotta panels, friezes and medallions were affixed to the frames of beds, chairs, tables, and upon cabinets and buffets, while gold or gilt was most freely used. Florence was the centre of art culture, it was fostered by the money and influence of the Medici family, and statues, frescos, bronzes, vases of the most glorious perfection and almost incomparable workmanship, were produced in quantities positively surprising, the remains of

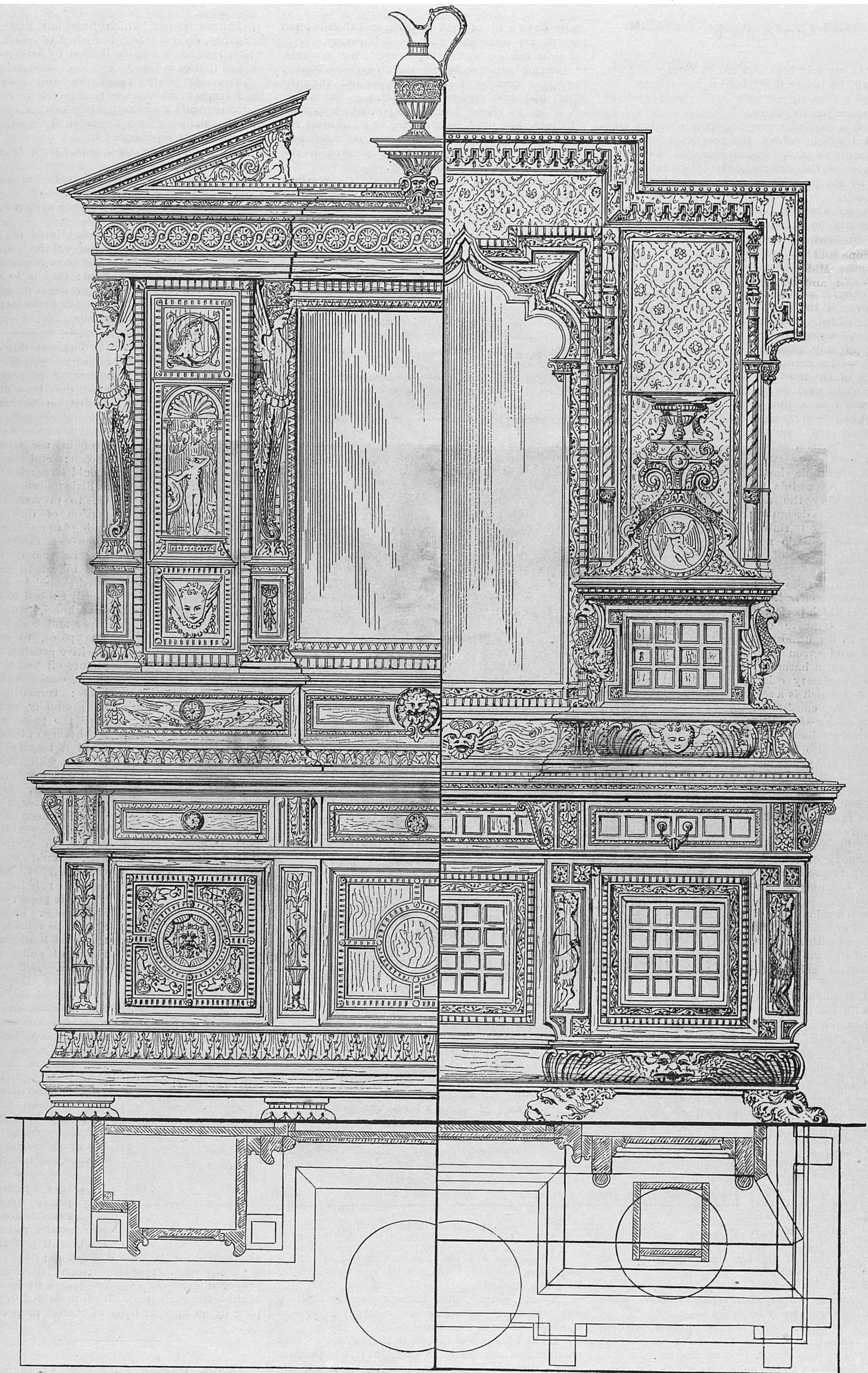
beautiful ornaments of silver and exquisite little figures, interspersed with miniatures and terminal figures of silver and gold, in full relief, united in pairs. There, are, besides, other compartments formed of jasper, agates, heliotropes, sardonyxes, carnelians and other precious stones."

As with the Italian, so too the Spanish era of perfection, their Augustin days of art were in the 15th and 16th centuries, when the most elaborate form of decoration prevailed, and the richest tones pervaded their art works. Their household adornments partook of the general disposition for the gorgeous, and the furnishings of their apartments were in accord with the prevailing taste in decoration. A series of Spanish Renaissance designs given by us in this journal in December last and for several months thereafter, conveyed an admirable idea of the beauty of the adornments of this age.

The carving was profuse and artistic, covering every available spot upon the pieces of furniture, and executed, as a rule, by competent and talented men. It seems as if the scope of objects for the carvers choice, was practically unlimited, for they embrace nearly every known phase of nature from the most delicate of fibrous growths, vines, clinging shrubs, and the like, to the form of animals of the higher and lower order, monkeys and creatures of that character susceptible of extravagant and exaggerated treatment. Nor was this

Quadrangular arm-chairs finished in leather or embroidered stuffs, together with richly inlaid tables and bedsteads, and beds of brocades embroidered with silver made the rooms gorgeous beyond belief, while the air was scented by burning crushed olive stones in silver braziers. Tapestry, silk and leather adorned the walls, and this exuberance of elegance and luxury continued unchanged until the seventeenth century when a heavier, more cumbersome style coming in vogue destroyed the harmony and beauty of the true Spanish Renaissance.

In our Parallel this month we show some very rich examples of the Italian and Spanish Renaissance style of furniture construction. Both of the sideboards displayed here are to be made entirely of wood, profusely carved. The Italian should be of ebony, body and panels. The panels might, with perfect propriety, be made of oxydized silver as well as the pitcher on the top. The Spanish sideboard is likewise of wood, with a veneer on the feet of porcelain or oxydized silver. The griffin caryatids and the small stand at the sides are also of silver or porcelain, while the plaque in the side stand is of metal. The upper panels upon the sides and top are painted on linen or wood and the hanging about the top is of silk. This combination of silver and wood gives a particularly rich and elegant finish, it may be expected, and such an effect as would naturally attract attention of the decorators of that age.



Italian Renaissance Character

APPLIED
ART

Spanish Renaissance Character

PARALLEL N^o 7.

*Guastavino Architect
New York*